

It's impossible to say any one band stole the weekend because no one would agree. One fellow Edmontonian was most excited for the lineup of Coalesce, Russian Circles, and Coliseum, three bands my tastes don't prefer. Another group, Lemuria, who I had never heard of, had the most fans adorning their t-shirts.

I encountered many forms of musical education and enjoyment. Bands I've loved for years like Strike Anywhere had me stage-diving and singing along like I was 16 years old again, while Sweden's Smalltown, previously unknown to me, had me hooked on every one of their melodic rhythms. The nightly after-parties, held at a warehouse outside the city limits, offered fans the opportunity to have a couple drinks with the dozen-or-so-bands, which would play abridged sets beginning at 2 a.m.

No two souls may completely agree on which show, venue, or band was the best, but my experience was best represented on day two.

Behind all chaos is some order, which at The Fest is their strict time schedule of when bands start and finish. The prior year, the vastly popular A Wilhelm Scream were cut off mid-song for running too long. However, no amount of scheduling diligence could combat a power outage at the main venue (aptly titled "The Venue"). A kink was thrown in both the organizers' time-crafting, and also our meticulously plotted itinerary of what bands to catch and where.

The plan to watch San Francisco's Dead to Me before heading to the wonderfully dark Market Street Pub for fellow Canadians, The Flatliners, was snuffed out upon hearing over a 2 p.m. whiskey that the two bands would be playing at nearly identical times. After half an hour in the sing-along fray that unfolded before Dead to Me, my three fellow Edmontonians

and I burst through The Venue's emergency exit in hopes that our frantic feet would carry us fast enough to catch the final notes of The Flatliners. As we re-entered Market Street's doors at a mildly intoxicated cheetah's pace, we were greeted with the opening chords of The Flatliners' "July! August! Reno!" Elation took over in the charge to the front of the stage to scream "these eyes are finally opening" right back at singer Chris Cresswell.

The Fest began with registration where concert-goers lined up around the Holiday Inn to receive their schedules and bracelets, which entitled them to all the benefits of the weekend, much like an all-inclusive resort. It ended with band-vans, Greyhounds, and sexy, silver, rented Dodge Sebrings parting Gainesville not with "goodbye," but "see you next year."

While many Fest virgins such as myself were bloodshot-eyed with hungover satisfaction, some veterans were grumbling. "It's too big," "It too oversold," "There wasn't enough room for my beard."

Fest architect Tony Weinbender also acknowledged in the introductory pamphlet that it might in fact be the final Fest. With increased popularity and size comes increased organization and responsibility; two notions not explicitly synonymous with the alcohol and musical excesses of the weekend.

Regardless of its future, I can shut my mind and mouth knowing that The Fest was important enough for people from all corners of the globe to come see three days of what others might perceive as poorly played guitar chords. Just as for some, it may be hip-hop, house, or those tattooed teeny-bopping heartthrobs Stereos, for us of the punk rock persuasion, Gainesville is a testament to where music, art, and expression can carry us.

IF THE INCREASINGLY ACCESSIBLE AND CORPORATE WARPED TOUR IS "PUNK ROCK SUMMER CAMP," THEN THE FEST IS A PABST-FUELLED BUSH PARTY THROWN BY ITS DRUNK AND SWEATY COUNSELLORS.

